United Nations A/C.1/57/PV.25

General Assembly
Fifty-seventh session

Official Records

First Committee
25th meeting
Friday, 1 November 2002, 10 a.m.
New York

Chairman: Mr. Kiwanuka ..... (Uganda)

The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Agenda item 59 (*continued*)

Question of Antarctica

General debate, consideration of and action on draft resolution (A/C.1/57/L.61)

The Chairman: The Committee will today take action on a draft resolution on the question of Antarctica submitted by the Chairman following consultations among groups and delegations.

The draft resolution is largely an updating of General Assembly resolution 54/45, of 1 December 1999. Inter alia, it takes note with satisfaction of the entry into force of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, welcomes the continuing cooperation among countries undertaking scientific research and activities in Antarctica, and welcomes also the increasing awareness of, and interest in, Antarctica shown by the international community. The draft resolution also reaffirms the conviction that, in the interests of mankind, Antarctica should continue forever to be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, and that it should not become the scene or object of international discord.

The draft resolution also welcomes the invitations extended to the Executive Director of the United Nations Environment Programme to attend Antarctic Treaty Consultative Meetings in order to assist in their substantive work, and urges the parties to continue to extend such invitations for future Consultative Meetings. The draft resolution welcomes the practice by the Consultative Parties of providing information pertaining to their meetings, as well as other relevant information on Antarctica, so as to enable the Secretary-General to submit a report for the consideration of the General Assembly at its sixtieth session.

I would like to suggest that the Committee proceed to take a decision on the draft resolution contained in document A/C.1/57/L.61. Unless I hear any objection, I shall consider that the Committee agrees with that suggestion.

It was so decided.

The Chairman: The Committee will now take a decision on draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61, entitled "Question of Antarctica".

I propose that the Committee adopt draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61 by consensus. Unless I hear any objection, I shall consider that the Committee agrees to adopt the draft resolution.

Draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61 was adopted.

Mr. Hasmy (Malaysia): I wish to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for introducing the draft resolution on the question of Antarctica (A/C.1/57/L.61), which we have just adopted. My delegation is pleased that the Committee was once again in a position to adopt a draft resolution on the subject of Antarctica by consensus. My delegation also wishes to place on record our sincere appreciation to the delegation of

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Poland, representing the Antarctic Treaty Consultative Parties, for the cooperation extended to us in the consultation process.

As the Chairman himself has just highlighted, the new draft resolution is basically an updating of resolution 54/45, which was adopted on 1 December 1999. By adopting draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61 this year, the Assembly will note with satisfaction the entry into force of the Madrid Protocol on Environmental Protection to the Antarctic Treaty, which, inter alia, reiterates the designation of the continent as a natural reserve devoted to peace and science. The Assembly would also continue to reaffirm that Antarctica should be managed and used in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations and in the interests of maintaining international peace and security and promoting international cooperation for the benefit of mankind as a whole.

My delegation commends the continuing cooperation of the Consultative Parties and the rest of the international community in sharing information pertaining to activities related to the Antarctic Treaty. We trust that the triennial debate on the question of Antarctica in the First Committee will continue to provide the members of the international community, both within and outside the Antarctic Treaty system, with a forum for meaningful discourse.

We look forward to closer and more constructive cooperation in the coming years, in the interests of ensuring that Antarctica will remain a natural reserve devoted to peace and science, for the benefit of all humanity.

Mr. Ogonowski (Poland): I would just like to echo what the representative of Malaysia has said, and to thank you, Mr. Chairman, for introducing this important document, draft resolution A/C.1/57/L.61. I also wish to thank the delegation of Malaysia for its input in the preparation of the draft resolution.

The Chairman: The First Committee has thus concluded its consideration of agenda item 59, entitled "Question of Antarctica".

Statement by the Chairman

The Chairman: The First Committee has met over the last several weeks to consider some of the most important issues on the international peace and security agenda. Those issues have ranged from small arms to the biggest arms. While we have worked in a businesslike fashion, we have not proceeded with business as usual, because there is nothing at all usual about the issues of international peace and security that we have addressed: each one is important. Most important of all, the Committee has reaffirmed the basic principle that multilateral cooperation is essential in addressing global security problems. That sound principle is the mighty rock upon which we must continue to build.

At the opening of this session, I reminded my colleagues of the need for the Committee to respond to the proposals in the Secretary-General's recent report on United Nations reform (A/57/387). That report emphasized, inter alia, the need to reduce the reporting requirements of the Secretariat, as well as the number of resolutions. I have no doubt that the members of the First Committee made every effort to achieve those goals, although we have in fact considered more draft resolutions and requested more reports than we did last year. While that will no doubt be an issue for the next Chairperson of the Committee to address, I urge all members to consider carefully the advantages of having fewer and more consolidated resolutions, as well as a smaller number of reports that are more focused and analytical. Real progress in these areas will enable all of us to devote our limited time and resources to achieving the most urgent and important items on our difficult agendas.

In assessing our progress in dealing with those items, the world will judge the effectiveness of our deliberations by the concrete progress achieved. That is precisely the kind of result-based approach that will best respond to the Secretary-General's call on the United Nations to keep its focus on doing what matters.

Accordingly, I urge all members of the Committee to engage in consultations before we meet next year to explore ways and means of responding more effectively to the Secretary-General's well-taken appeal. It goes without saying that progress in such difficult fields as disarmament and non-proliferation occurs incrementally, often over very many years. Like a stream cutting its way through a giant canyon, such progress often must overcome enormous obstacles.

Yet, dedicated efforts in these fields have shown that, with enough political will, vision and dedicated effort, it is indeed possible to move mountains. We may not have solved all the world's problems this

month, but we have made some progress. Of the 23 draft resolutions that were subject to recorded votes, 15 gained support compared with previous recorded votes, and over half of those gaining votes dealt with nuclear issues. But such simple comparisons of votes are risky, given the substantive differences in the texts of individual draft resolutions. Nevertheless, these votes represent a positive development. They suggest that the incremental process of building support for global norms is continuing, in spite of the persistent tensions in our troubled world today.

The Committee also adopted five new draft resolutions — on bilateral strategic nuclear arms reduction; on reduction in non-strategic nuclear weapons, on national legislation on arms transfers; on weapons of mass destruction; and on the promotion of multilateralism — which were approved either by large majorities or without a vote.

However, before we celebrate such achievements, any fair assessment might also note the persistence of some deeply divisive voting patterns on certain draft resolutions. There were, for example, more than 40 abstentions or negative votes on 10 draft resolutions, seven of which dealt with nuclear issues. It should also be noted that four draft resolutions lost support, compared with previous recorded votes on similar texts; all these dealt with weapons of mass destruction. These divisions show that, while the Committee is broadly unified on the fundamental goals of disarmament and non-proliferation, there remain some substantial disagreements on the appropriate means to achieve such goals. As long as our disagreements do not compromise our goals, they should best be seen as just part of the process of building support for global norms, which takes time and persistent effort. These votes suggest that work that remains ahead in pursuance of our goals.

Our broadest achievement has been to kindle faith in the fundamental objectives of disarmament and non-proliferation as a way to enhance international peace and security and in the essential role of multilateralism in pursuing that goal. That is no small accomplishment. It reflects well on the integrity of the Committee, and it should inspire hope for additional progress in the years to come.

I wish finally to express my great appreciation to all members of the Committee for the cooperation extended to me during this session. I have also been deeply impressed with the spirit of compromise and flexibility shown by all delegations during the entire session of the Committee. It was indeed a pleasure and an honour for me to work with such a distinguished group of professionals and experts.

I also thank members for their full cooperation and support in so efficiently utilizing the time and facilities allocated to the First Committee. It is my strong belief that the First Committee has once again set the benchmark for all other Committees in terms of effective time management and the efficient use of conference facilities.

I wish also to express my deepest appreciation and admiration to my fellow Bureau members, namely, my Vice-Chairmen, Ambassador José Nicolás Rivas of Colombia, Mr. Jamal Nassir Al-Bader of Qatar and Mr. Razvan Rusu of Romania, and, of course, our Rapporteur, Mr. Mehmet Samsar of Turkey. Their advice and assistance were instrumental in enabling me to effectively discharge my functions as Chairman of this body.

Allow me, on behalf of the Committee, to offer my sincere gratitude to the Under-Secretary-General for Disarmament Affairs, Mr. Jayantha Dhanapala, for the support he and his staff from the Department for Disarmament Affairs have provided. My special thanks go to the Secretary of the First Committee, Mr. Mohammad Sattar, who is our bedrock, and his staff for all their tireless effort throughout this session of the Committee.

I also wish to thank all the interpreters, translators, record-keepers, press officers, document officers, conference officers and sound engineers who have diligently worked behind the scenes in order to bring the work of this Committee to a successful conclusion.

And, although they seldom get the credit they deserve, I also would like to pay tribute to the many non-governmental organizations (NGOs) which brought information to this Committee and which have been reporting on our activities to their respective constituencies. The greater the public understanding and appreciation of the work that we do in this Committee, the greater will be the likelihood that national Governments will respond to the urgent demand for action to convert the principled goals of our important agenda into concrete achievements. I have little doubt that NGOs play and will continue to

play a vital role in that respect, and I wish all of them a very fruitful future.

The First Committee will reconvene next year, sometime in July or August, in order to elect a Chairperson for the fifty-eighth session of the General Assembly.

The 2002 session of the First Committee is thus concluded.

The meeting rose at 10.30 a.m.